ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA RECOVERY AT A PORTION OF 38CH1457, JAMES ISLAND, CHARLESTON COUNTY, S.C.

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Submitted to:
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Chicora Research Contribution 253

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ABSTRACT

This report outlines the results of archaeological data recovery excavations conducted at 38CH1453, a portion of the Secessionville site on James Island in Charleston County, South Carolina. The site, identified as a result of earlier survey efforts, was found to represent a Confederate encampment associated with Fort Lamar and the Secessionville works.

The developer of the tract, Special Properties of Charleston, South Carolina, developed a plan to use only a single dirt access road for all of the lots, which would ring the margin of the peninsula on which the site is situated. The State Historic Preservation Office determined that this plan would adequately green space the majority of the site and required data recovery investigations only at a small portion of the site, to be impacted by the construction of a single house.

The foot print, measuring 30 by 50 feet, was first tested with the excavation of two 5-foot squares, which failed to yield any substantive collection of historic materials. Subsequently, the 30 by 50 foot area was stripped using mechanical equipment in order to determine if any features might be present. None were encountered.

As a result of these investigations it appears that no significant archaeological or historical remains will be impacted by the house proposed for Lot 3. Assuming that the remainder of the site is green spaced in accordance with the plan approved by the State Historic Preservation Office, no additional research is called for.

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Project Background

In November 1996 Chicora Foundation conducted an intensive archaeological survey of an 11 acre tract of a portion of the Secessionville peninsula on James Island, southwest of the City of Charleston (Barr 1996) (Figure 1). This area is on some maps called Clarks Point and is situated at the far eastern end of the peninsula (Figure 2). As a result of the work two previously recorded sites, 38CH1457 and 38CH1462, were identified on the study tract.

Site 38CH1457 represents a diffuse and ephemeral scatter of highly eroded prehistoric sherds and a scatter of nineteenth century remains which appear to consist of the remains from a Civil War encampment, as well as possible postbellum occupation by freedmen. This site was recommended as eligible for inclusion on the National Register, based on the historic remains (the prehistoric remains were recommended as non-contributing).

Site 38CH1462 represents the remains of the Fort Lamar water battery, found primarily on the eastern shoreline of the Secessionville peninsula. The site consists of earthworks and associated ditches, as well as an unfinishedbombproof. The site was recommended eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurred with these site evaluations and a series of discussions were entered into between Mr. John Templeton with Special Properties and Mr. Lee Tippett with the SHPO. With Mr. Tippett's departure from that agency, the discussions began anew with Dr. Chris Sherman.

The proposed development includes a series of five lots along the western, northwestern, and northern edge of the peninsula, with a central common area through which access and utilities would be run. Individual house sites would be between the OCRM management line and, where

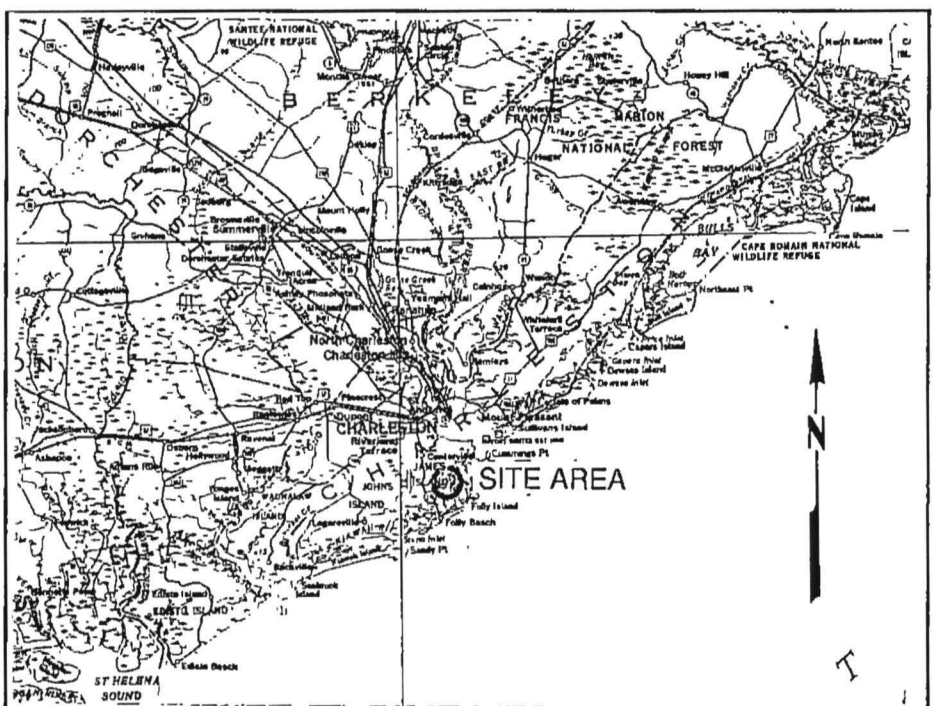
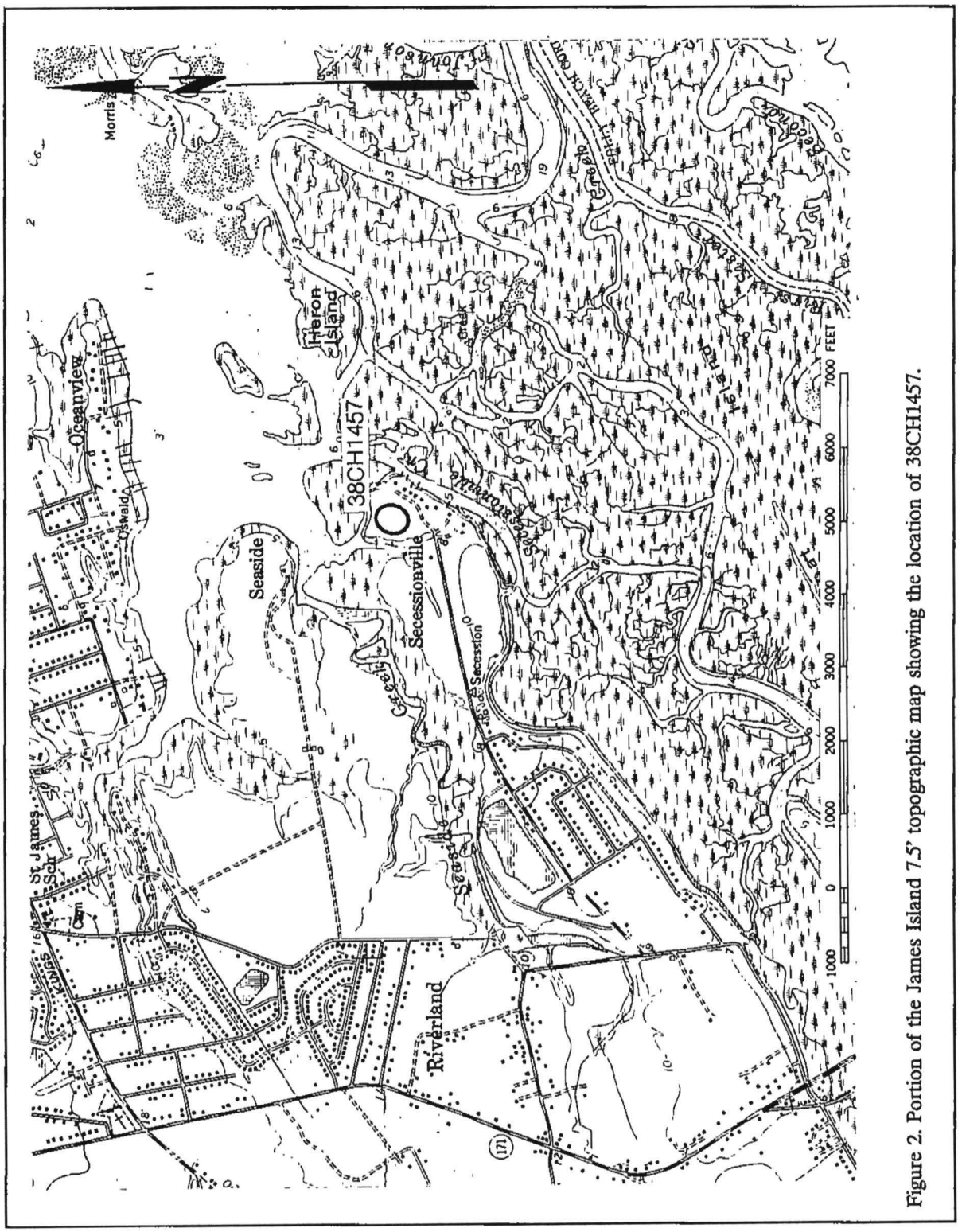


Figure 1. Location of the project area southwest of Charleston (from USGS South Carolina, scale is approximately 1 inch to 16 miles).


Morris
Heron Island
Oceanview
Oswald
38CH1457
Seaside
Secessionville
Riverland
St James
Sch
Creek
Secession
Secession
Secession

possible, the site boundaries for 38CH1457 and 38CH1462. During these discussions the portion of the property containing 38CH1462 was conveyed by Templeton to an adjacent property owner — taking that particular portion of the survey tract out of the development process.

Eventually an agreement was reached between Templeton and the SHPO that outlined how the development would take place. In particular, the agreement indicated that no archaeological investigations would be required for the access road to the individual tracts or the associated utilities, as long as the road met certain conditions, including that the road plans were approved by the County, that no grading or excavation take place, and that a geotextile be placed between the site soils and any fill brought in to build up the road bed (letter from Mr. John Templeton to Dr. Chris Sherman, dated March 2, 1998).

This effectively limited data recovery operations to the one building lot where the house footprint had to partially located within the boundaries of 38CH1457. There, Templeton and the SHPO agreed to a very limited program consisting of several 5-foot units followed by mechanical stripping (letter from Mr. John Templeton to Dr. Chris Sherman, dated March 2, 1998).

During this process, a Memorandum of Agreement was prepared and circulated to the SHPO and the Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (OCRM). Both parties agreed to the stipulations and proposed preservation plan (the MOA was approved by OCRM on April 16, 1998).

A data recovery plan for the small portion of 38CH1457 to be affected by the proposed undertaking was prepared and forwarded to Dr. Sherman on March 18, 1998. In general, the plan outlined the excavation:

> of between two and five 5-foot units in the footprint area, with the exact number depending on the quantity of materials recovered. Minimally, however, two units will be excavated in different footprint areas to provide a sample of the remains present and also to help guide stripping efforts (letter from Dr. Michael Trinkley to Dr. Chris Sherman, dated March 18, 1998).

At the conclusion of the controlled excavations the data recovery plan specified that the plowzone over the building footprint would be stripped using mechanical equipment. Features would be identified, cleaned, photographed, and plotted. A sample, depending on the number encountered, would be excavated. If no features were encountered, no additional work was proposed.

This data recovery plan was approved by the SHPO and the work was undertaken by Chicora Foundation in late May 1998. This report provides the results of this project.

Environmental Setting

The project area, as previously mentioned, is situated on what may be described as a peninsula about 3200 feet in width and constricting to the southwest. In general, the area is very level, representing a slightly elevated sand ridge with elevations of 5 to 10 feet above mean sea level running roughly east-west. The topography slopes to the north, toward the marshes of Seaside Creek, and to the south, toward the marshes of Secessionville Creek. To the east is Clark's Sound formed at the confluence of Seaside Creek and Secessionville Creek. The project area is typical of James Island which consists of large sandy plains interrupted by marsh and tidal creeks.

Only two soil series occur in the project area: Seabrook loamy fine sands and Wando loamy fine sands. The Wando soils dominate the area, with the Seabrook soils found only in the southeastern quadrant of the project area, primarily adjacent to Fort Lamar Road (Miller 1971: Maps 69 and 70). The Seabrook soils typically have an Ap horizon about 0.8 foot in depth which consists of a very dark grayish-brown (10YR3/2) loamy fine sand overlying a C1 horizon

of dark-brown (10YR4/3) sand to a depth of about 1.8 feet (Miller 1971:27). The Wando soils present a very similar profile with an Ap horizon of dark brown (10YR4/3) sand to 0.8 foot overlying a C1 horizon of brown (7.5YR5/4) sand to about 2.8 feet (Miller 1971:30). The primary difference between the two is that the Wando soils are excessively drained while the Seabrook soils are moderately well drained. In addition, the Seabrook soils tend to be more acidic than the Wando soils.

The major climatic controls of the area are latitude, elevation, distance from the ocean, and location with respect to the average tracks of migratory cyclones. Charleston's latitude of 32°37'N places it on the edge of the balmy subtropical climate typical of Florida, further south. As a result, there are relatively short, mild winters and long, warm, humid summers. The large amount of nearby warm ocean water surface produces a marine climate, which tends to moderate both the cold and hot weather. The Appalachian Mountains, about 220 miles to the northwest, block the shallow cold air masses from the northwest, moderating them before they reach the sea islands (Mathews et al. 1980:46).

The average high temperature in the Charleston in July is 81°F, although temperatures are frequently in the 90s during much of July (Kjerfve 1975:C-4). The area normally experiences a high relative humidity, adding greatly to the discomfort. Kjerfve (1975:C-5) found an annual mean value of 73.5% RH, with the highest levels occurring during the summer.

The annual rainfall in this portion of Charleston is about 49 inches, fairly evenly spaced over the year. While adequate for most crops, there may be periods of both excessive rain and drought. The Charleston area has recorded up to 20 inches of rain in a single month and the rainfall over a three month period has exceeded 30 inches no less than nine times in the past 37 years. Likewise, periods of draught can occur and cause considerable damage to crops and livestock.

The annual growing season is 295 days, one of the longest in South Carolina. This mild climate, adequate rainfall, and long growing season, as Hilliard (1984:13) notes, is largely responsible for the presence of many southern crops, such as cotton and sugar cane.

The area of the study tract exhibits two major ecosystems: the maritime forest ecosystem which consists of the upland forest areas, and the estuarine ecosystem of deep water tidal habitats (Sandifer et al. 1980:7-9).

In the uplands on the sea islands the Oak-Pine forests are most common, constituting large areas of Charleston's original forest community. In some areas palmetto becomes an important sub-dominant. Typically these forests are dominated by the laurel oak with pine (primarily loblolly with minor amounts of longleaf pine) as the major canopy co-dominant. Hickory is present, although uncommon. Other trees found are the sweet gum and magnolia, with sassafras, red bay, American holly, and wax myrtle and palmetto found in the understory. Today, virtually all of the project area's high ground evidences some form or another of disturbance, with much of this disturbance clearly being agricultural in nature. Portions of the study tract contain scrub hardwoods, representing idle fields allowed to naturally go out of cultivation (Figure 3).

The estuarine ecosystem in the vicinity includes those areas of deep water tidal habitats and adjacent tidal wetlands, found at the northern, eastern and western edge of the project. Salinity in these areas may range from 0.5 parts per thousand (ppt) at the head of an estuary to 30 ppt where it comes into contact with the ocean. Estuarine systems are influenced by ocean tides, precipitation, fresh water runoff from the upland areas, evaporation, and wind. The system may be subdivided into two major components: subtidal and intertidal (Sandifer et al. 1980:158-159). These estuarine systems are extremely important to our understanding of both prehistoric and historic occupations because they naturally contain a high biomass. The estuarine area contributes vascular flora used for basket making, as well as mammals, birds, fish (over 107 species), and shellfish.

Historic Setting

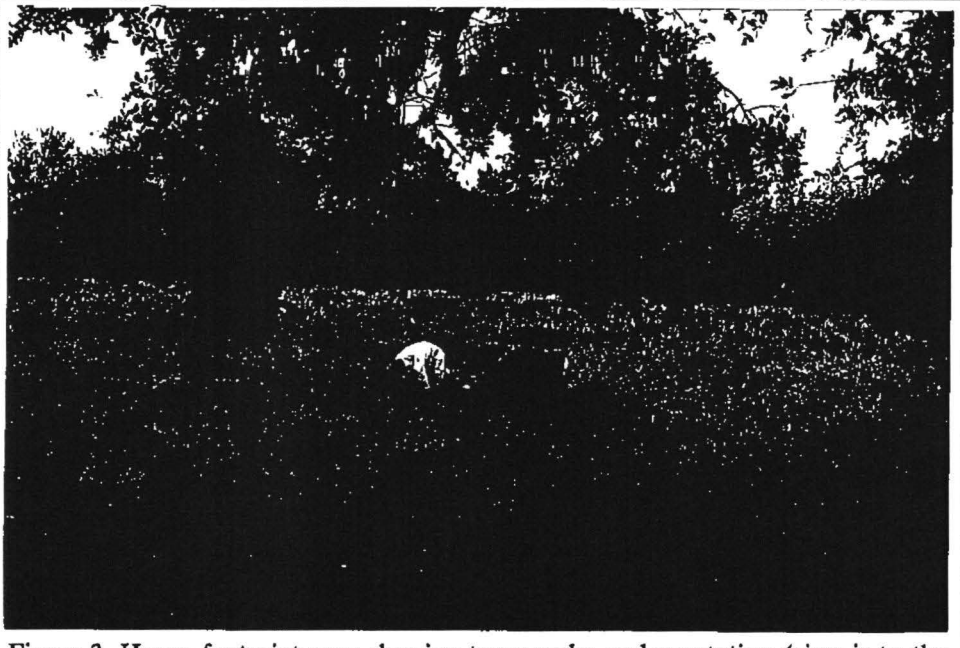


Figure 3. House footprint area showing topography and vegetation (view is to the southeast).

The history of the Secessionville area has been extensively recounted by recent Chicora investigations (see, for example, Barr 1996 and Trinkley and Hacker 1997). In addition, there are a variety of authors who have focused on the Civil War importance of the Secessionville area, including Brennan (1996), Côté (1995), and Power (1992). In addition, such authors as Burton (1970) and Rosen (1994) also help to place the site in a broader perspective. As a result, this discussion will provide only a very brief synopsis of that portion of the history for which the site is best known.

Among the Confederates' greatest fears was that the Union army would launch an assault on James Island, since if it fell, artillery batteries on the island would almost certainly lay waste to the inner harbor defenses. As a result, extensive defensive batteries were erected on James Island. One of these, at Secessionville, was begun in January 1862. Colonel Lewis M. Hatch and the 23rd South Carolina Infantry constructed a four-gun battery across the narrow neck of the peninsula, an observation tower immediately behind the battery, and a bridge at the northeast corner of the peninsula to connect it with the mainland and provide a rear exit.

Considering the context, it is easy to understand the relentless effort placed into the Charleston defenses, including those at Secessionville. The fortifications consisted of a barbette battery with two bastioned salients and on re-entrant angle. The gorge was open, although by June of 1862 two magazines had been built, the newer one including a bombproof.

The Confederate army defending Charleston dug itself in, staked its territory, and established a clear boundary. Major General David Hunter saw an opportunity to attack James Island and perhaps even push on to Charleston. In early May 1862 he assigned Brigadier General Henry W. Benham the task of developing plans to assault the city by way of James Island (Power 1992:157-158) and on June 2, 1862 Benham landed about 11,500 troops in the vicinity of Grimball's plantation on the southwestern tip of James Island. Although the Confederate forces were aware of this landing and sent out scouting parties, they did little else.

At this juncture, General Hunter left James Island to seek additional reinforcements, leaving Benham in charge and effectively postponing the efforts to take Charleston. For reasons that are still not clear, Benham embarked on what he called a "reconnaissance in force" to

overwhelm Secessionville on June 16, 1862 — a maneuver which others describe as a battle and which resulted in the Union forces being repulsed.

Côté observes that the Secessionville works, known initially only as the Tower Battery, was an impressive, if not completed, defensive work in late May 1862:

> The fort at Secessionville embodied a sophisticated array of defenses. It stretched the entire width of the narrowest part of the peninsula, thereby requiring any attacker to confront it head-on — where they were in the direct line of the fort's artillery and small arms fire.
>
> An attaching army had virtually no room to maneuver, for the neck of land on which the fort was built narrowed to a killing field less than two hundred yards wide directly in front of the fort. Flanking maneuvers were made impossible by the salt marsh, which protected both sides of the fort, and any frontal assault was immediately slowed down by an abatis — a barricade of felled trees with the sharpened branches facing the enemy.
>
> After penetrating the abatis, the attacker had to deal with a moat seven feet deep and then scale a nine-foot high, hard packed earthwork. Those who withstood their withering fire and made it to the parapet of the earthwork then faced a second line of defense, for the whole interior of the fort could be swept by fire from a series of rifle pits in the rear of the fort. Outside the fort, the woods and bushes between the fort and the village were also filled with Confederate sharpshooters (Côté 1995:68).

By about 7:30 in the morning, 3½ hours after the battle began, the Union troops began their withdrawal. Like most of the battles to follow in the Civil War, the Confederate troops did not capitalize on their victory by following the Federal forces. One explanation may be that, proportionally, the Confederate losses were nearly as great. Total Union casualties numbered 683 (107 killed, 487 wounded, and 89 captured or missing), representing nearly 20% of the 3,500 troops committed to the battle. Confederate casualties included 52 killed, 144 wounded, and 8 captured or missing out of a total of 1,250 troops, or about 16% (Power 1992:168).

For their part, the Confederate defenders realized the extraordinary importance of James Island to the defense of Charleston and spent much of the rest of the Civil War improving these defensive lines. Confederate Brigadier General Johnson Hagood, who served as Colonel of the 1st South Carolina Infantry, at Secessionville during its attack, later extensively quoted from General Ripley's report of the defenses:

> General Beauregard's efforts were confined principally to completing the defenses of Charleston. On James Island, with which this writer is most familiar, there became very complete. Pemberton's and Ripley's lines from Secessionville, by way of Royall's house to Fort Pemberton, were abandoned. Starting at Secessionville a line much shorter was carried to Dill's, just above Grimball's on the Stono. This was a cremaillere [crenelated] infantry breastwork of strong profile, with heavy enclosed redoubts at distances of 700 to 800 yards, having defensive relations to each other. On the Stono were one or two heavy redoubts securing that flank. Fort Pemberton was nearly, if not quite, dismantled. From

> Secessionville to Fort Johnson, along the eastern shore of the island looking towards Folly and Morris Islands, heavy batteries, opened to the rear with trenches or breastworks for infantry supports, were erected, and from Johnson to opposite the city heavy batteries for the defense of the inner harbor. Bombproofs, covered ways, rifle pits and all appliances of the engineer's art were exhausted in strengthening this system of works (Hagood 1910:169).

During late 1862 and early 1863 the Secessionville works were increased from a four-gun battery to a nine-gun fort with two power magazines and bombproofs (Butler 1994:39). By late 1863 Major John G. Pressley, of the 1st South Carolina, wrote:

> Regiment moved to Secessionville, and encamped between the line of houses and marsh towards the north. The field and staff officers occupied houses. Headquarters were in the red-top house owned by Mr. Lawton. The post was under my command.... This place had been greatly strengthened since we occupied it last July. Strong breastworks and formidable batteries had been built along the creek south of the peninsula, and just in front of the line of houses. A large bomb-proof had been constructed about one hundred and fifty yards northwesterly from Lawton's House [known as the Seabrook-Freer House today]. Battery Lamar, across the neck of the peninsula, had been put in first-rate condition; in fact, the post was in a thoroughly defensive state (quoted in Butler 1994:43).

While Secessionville was never again attacked, the Union occupation of Morris Island, as well as the Union presence on the rivers, kept Secessionville under constant pressure. On February 17, 1865 Confederate forces in and

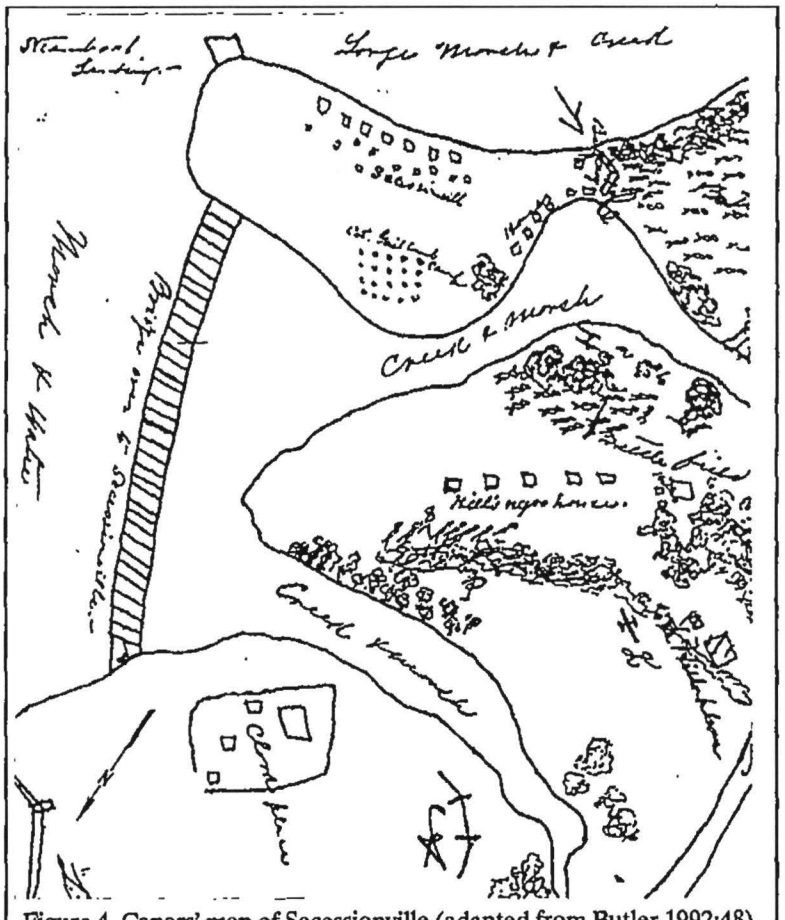


Figure 4. Capers' map of Secessionville (adapted from Butler 1992:48).

around Charleston withdrew, joining the remnants of the Army of Tennessee in North Carolina. On February 19, Lt. General W.J. Hardee reported to Jefferson Davis, "Charleston was successfully evacuated Friday night and Saturday morning" (*Official Records*, Series I, vol. 47, part 1, p. 1071). On February 18, while the Confederate forces were quietly leaving Charleston, Company A of the 21st U.S. Colored Troops entered the abandoned fortifications at Secessionville.

Of the many maps of the Secessionville area there are only two which provide much information concerning the study area. One is reported by Côté (1995:79) to have been produced by Lt. Col. Ellison Capers, an artillery officer. This same map is attributed to a Major Manigault and given an 1864 date by Butler (1994:Figure 23). Based on the detail shown, it seems more likely that the earlier date suggested by Côté is correct. In particular, the sketch (Figure 4) shows the encampment of Lt. Col. Peter Gaillard (who assumed command during the Battle of Secessionville after Lamar was wounded). Although the scale is clearly distorted, surveys north of Fort Lamar road reveal that this camp must have been at 38CH1457.

In the Spring of 1865, S.R. Seibert took the only known photograph of Secessionville (Figure 5). Reproduced by Côté (1995:105) from the National Archives RG 165-C, Photograph C-775, it shows the two surviving waterfront houses, Fort Lamar, the Secessionville earthworks, a portion of the Clark's Point water battery fortifications, and a number of frame structures. Côté describes these frame structures as "huts built as troop quarters." A number of objects in the picture (the east side of the Seabrook-Freer house and the view of Fort Lamar to the right on the horizon) would indicate that the photo was taken looking west. As well, the view of a large mound (considered as part of the bombproof by Butler 1994), determined to be a corner of the earthworks, visible in the left foreground would indicate that Seibert's camera was probably set up somewhere on top of the Clark's Point water battery walls. Unfortunately, the type of camera and lens used are unknown, and the exact position and angle of the shot cannot be determined. As can be seen in the photo, in the foreground there are a series of huts facing one another which run north-south. As well, a second row of huts in the background look to be running east-west. The distance between them seems to indicate that each row faced upon a road or street.

Côté also states that these huts were "later occupied by the Freedmen" shortly after they were no longer needed by soldiers. This seems reasonable, but he goes on to note that the waterfront residences were "torn down to furnish the lumber for these," which seems unlikely based on other historical evidence (see Trinkley and Hacker 1997:48). Regardless, it may be unreasonable to expect that we can identify a one-to-one correlation of demolition and building, especially if the demolition was conducted in anticipation of a spirited defense, as implied by General Beauregard's complaints that General Hardee was still hesitating his abandonment of Charleston as late as February 16 (*Official Records*, Series I, vol. 47, part 1, p. 1048).

Research Strategy

Site 38CH1457 was recommended eligible based on the diversity of data sets recovered from the initial survey and the convergence of both archaeological and historical data, pointing to the site as the location of Confederate encampments during the Civil War. In particular, the research at 38CH1456 (Trinkley and Hacker 1997) pointed out how difficult Civil War occupation might be to identify — even in areas where it might reasonably be expected.

As a result, the research proposed for the small portion to be impacted by development activities was largely exploratory. It was designed to determine if Civil War remains might be present in that particular area. The combination of formal excavation units and stripping was thought to be a cost-effective approach to determine the need for even more extensive research since the approach had just recently been used with great success at the portion of Secessionville south of Fort Lamar Road (Trinkley and Hacker 1997).

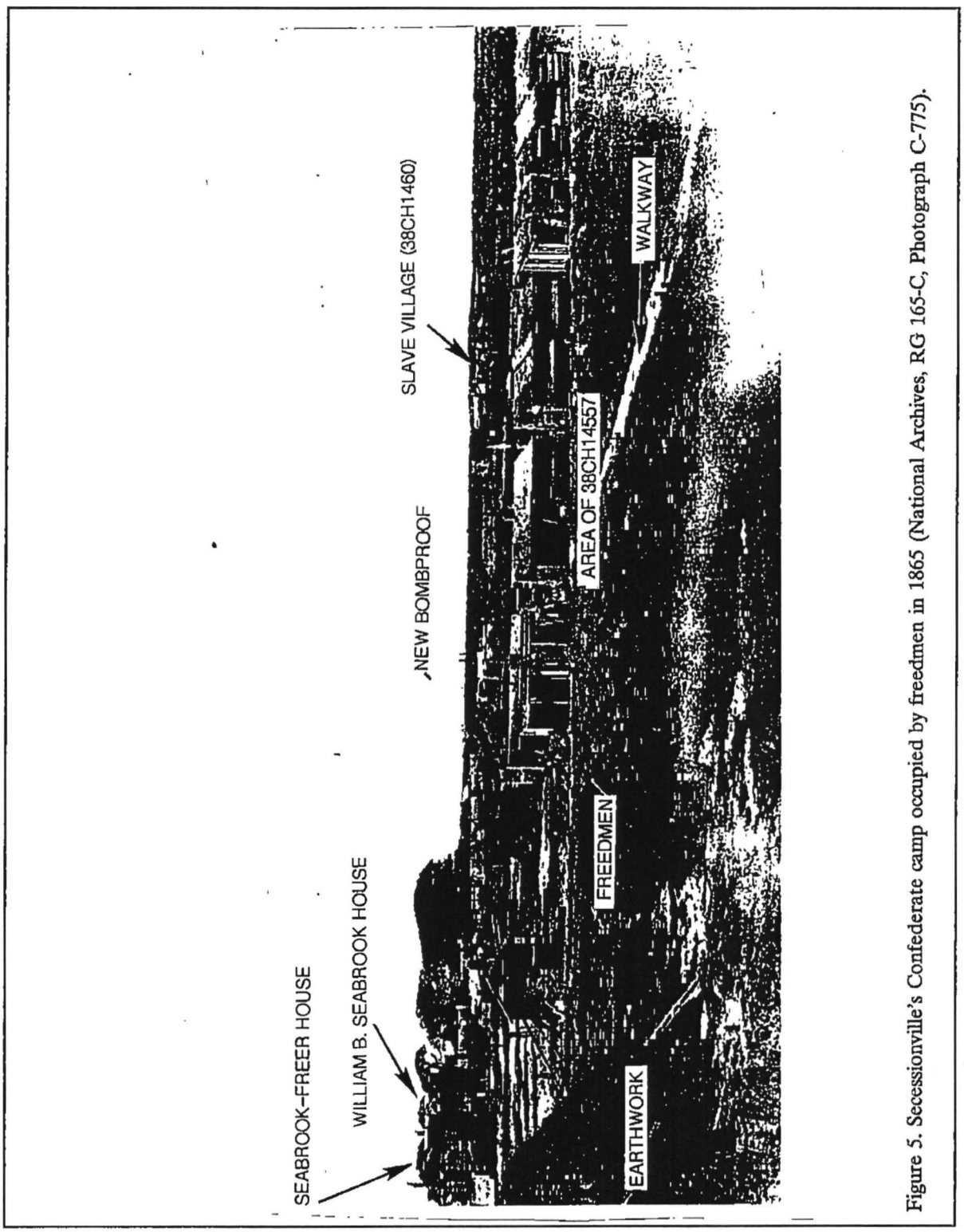


Figure 5. Secessionville's Confederate camp occupied by freedmen in 1865 (National Archives, RG 165-C, Photograph C-775).

DATA RECOVERY EFFORTS

Excavation of Units

Prior to these investigations the 30 by 50-foot house footprint was established by Forsberg Engineering and Surveying based on the platted locations incorporated into the Memorandum of Agreement (Figure 6). Two 5-foot units were initially laid out in the footprint — one (designated Test Unit 1) in the northwest corner and the other (designated Test Unit 2) in the southeast corner.

Each unit was excavated by natural soil zone, which at this site consisted of a plowzone of dark brown (10YR4/3) sand about 0.8 to 1.0 foot in depth. This overlaid a subsoil of brown (7.5YR5/4) sand. All of the plowzone was screened through ¼-inch mesh and the artifacts were collected and bagged by provenience. At the base of the plowzone, the units were trowelled and photographed.

No features were encountered, although both units (see Figures 7 and 8) revealed deep plowscars. Artifacts in both units were limited to a small collection of heavily fragmented prehistoric sherds (representing the scatter of aboriginal material initially recovered during the survey, but identified as a non-contributing resource to the site's eligibility) and a very small number of historic materials. Based on this, it appears that the house, as expected, is situated on the edge of the Civil War encampment. No additional units were excavated.

Mechanical Stripping

At the conclusion of the formal excavation arrangements were made for the house footprint to be completely stripped in order to expose any features which might be present but not detected by the formal excavations.

This stripping was accomplished by a small dozer running transects east-west, piling the spoil along the eastern margin of the house site. As the subsoil was exposed the path of the dozer was examined for evidence of staining or artifacts, since either of which might indicate that a feature was exposed. Where necessary, the surface was shovel skimmed to expose possible features.

No evidence of features or post holes were encountered in the stripped area. In addition, no artifacts were identified. At the conclusion of the work the house site was backfilled.

Recovered Artifacts

The only artifacts collected during this work were found in the two formal test units. These remains have been curated with the S.C. Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology and are briefly described below.

Unit 1 produced nine brick fragments (0.3 kg) which were discarded. Also present were three fragments of black glass, three pieces of clear glass, and one fragment of brown glass. Two ginger beer bottle stoneware fragments completed the historic assemblage. The prehistoric remains consisted of 35 small (i.e., under 1-inch in diameter) sherds. Although not examined in detail, at least two are likely Thom's Creek sherds.

Unit 2 yielded a very similar assemblage, although only two fragments of brick (with a weight of 0.1 kg) were present. The remaining historic assemblage consisted of three fragments of black glass and eight fragments of clear bottle glass. This unit produced one Thom's Creek Reed Punctate, one Thom's Creek Simple Stamped, and two Thom's Creek Plain sherds, as well as 18 small sherds.

Notably absent from the collections were metal artifacts. We found no nails or other architectural remains and even the use of a metal detector during the stripping operations failed to

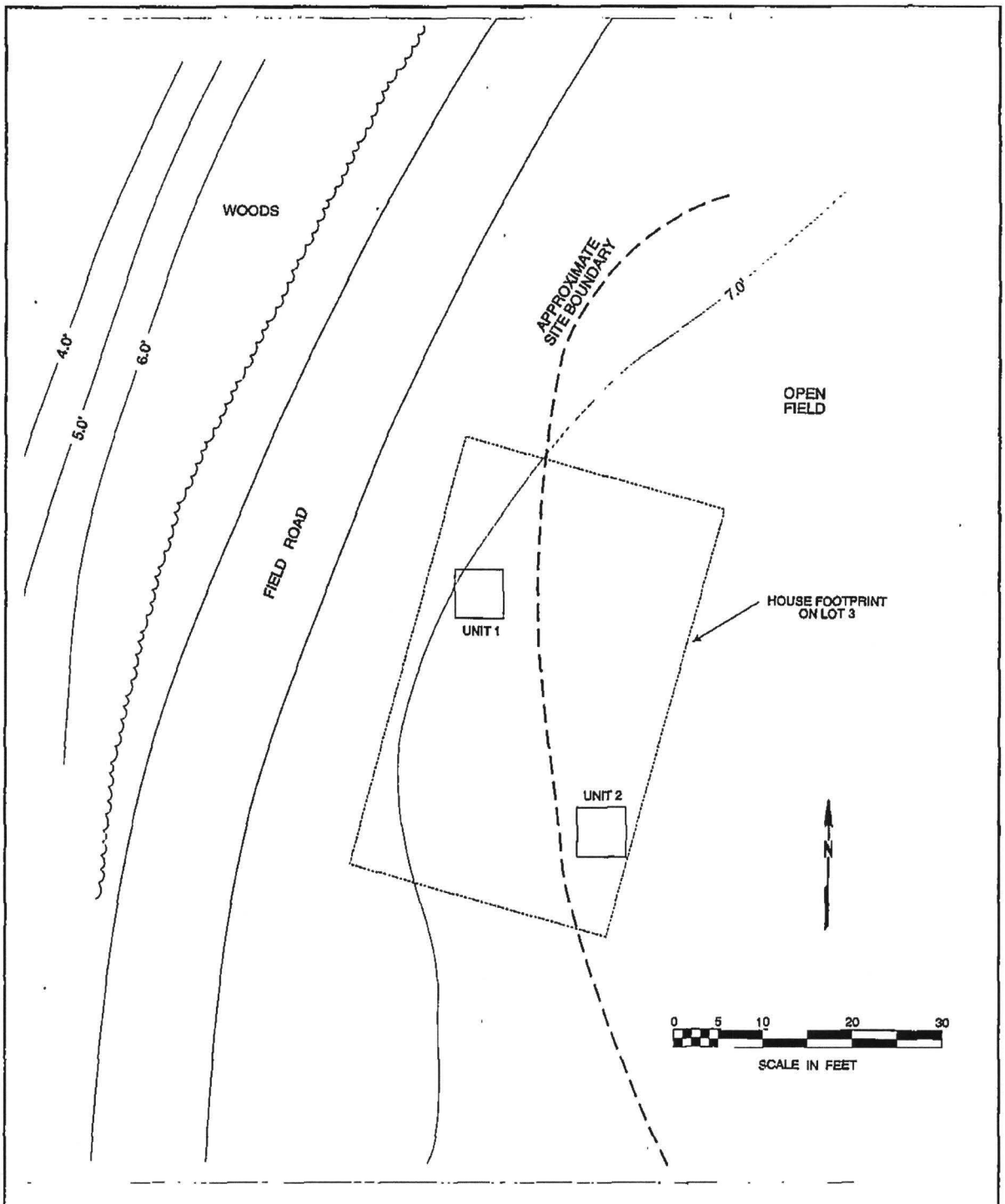


Figure 6. Excavations in the house footprint area.

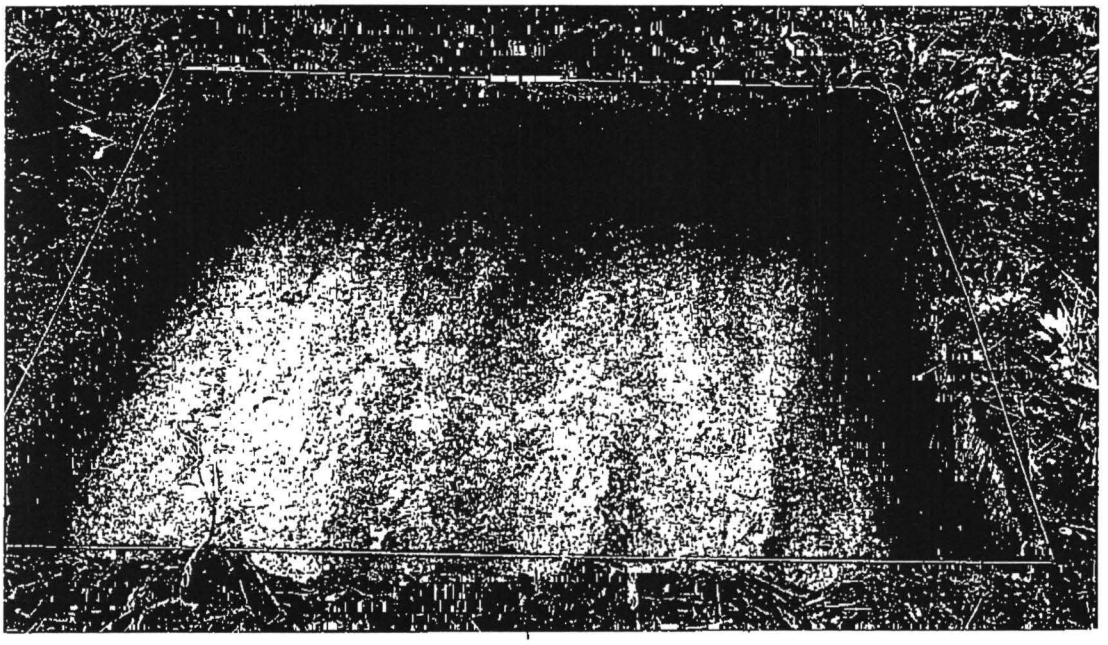


Figure 7. Unit 1 at the base of the plowzone, looking north.

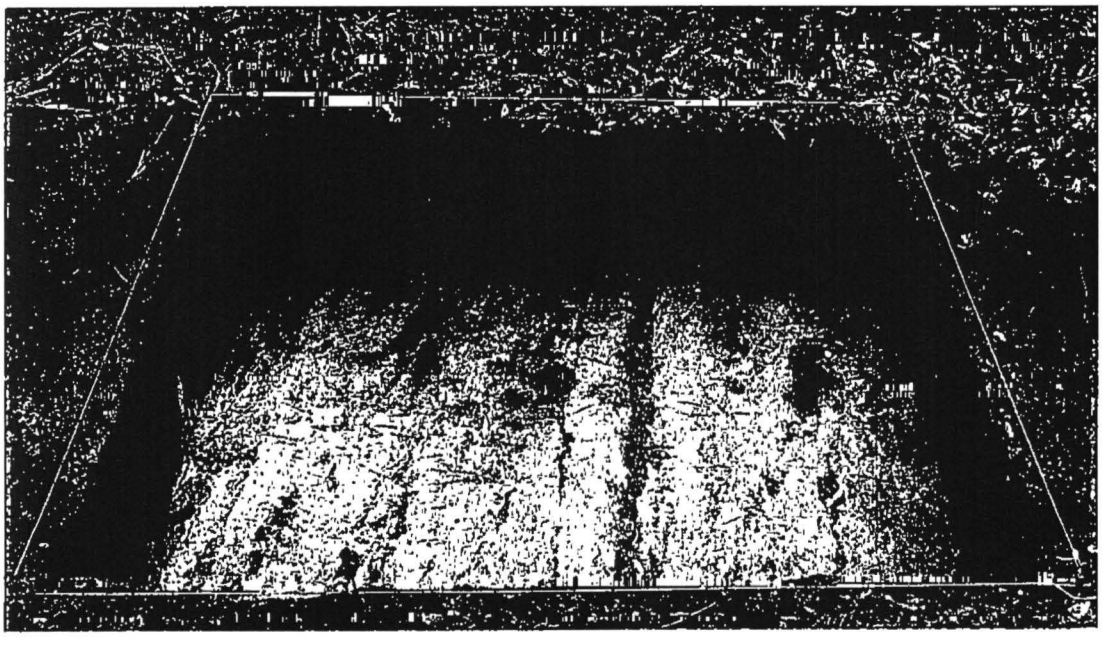


Figure 8. Unit 2 at the base of the plowzone, looking north.

recover any materials except modern shotgun shell caps and beverage can fragments. Also absent from the collections are any military items, although the ginger beer bottle fragments are frequently found at camps.

Much of the clear glass, although by no means all, represented modern debris. With these materials removed, the nineteenth century historic assemblage is reduced to only five specimens from Unit 1 (1 per 5 ft²) and six from Unit 2 (1 per 4.2 ft²). These are clearly very low densities and they appear to support the interpretation that both units were placed at the edge of the main site area.

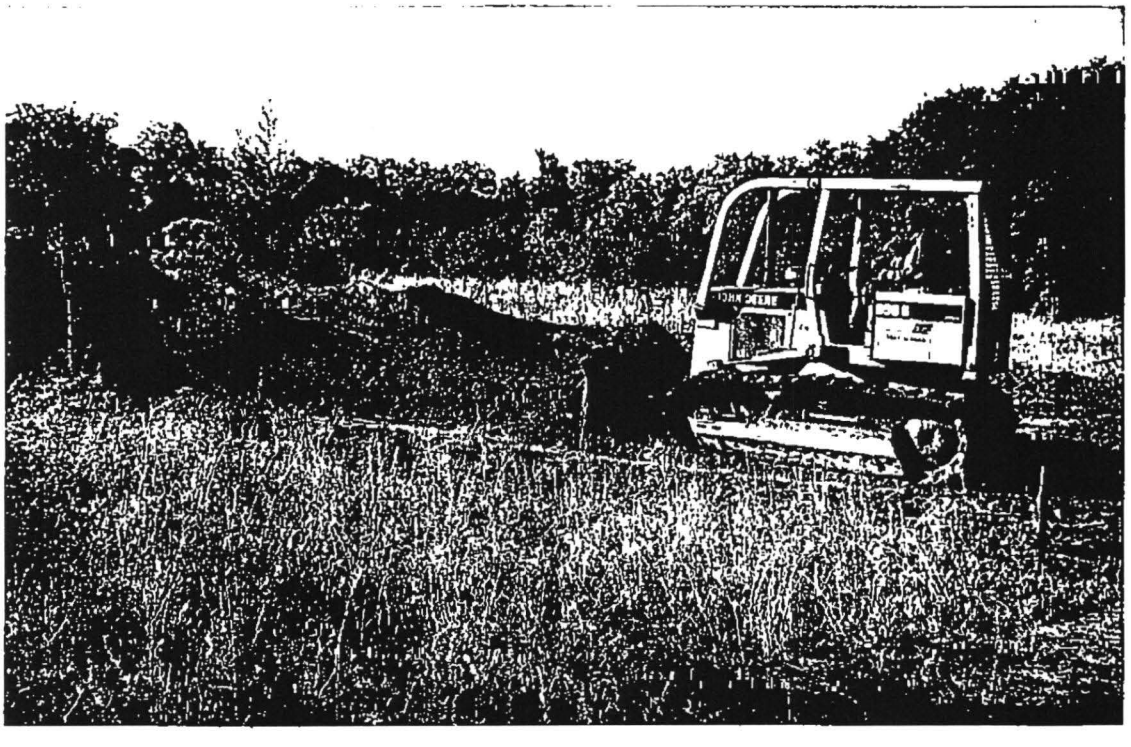


Figure 9. Mechanical stripping of the house footprint area, view to the southeast.

SUMMARY

From a research perspective, the results of this data recovery are very disappointing — no semi-subterranean soldier huts were found, no privies or wells associated with the camp were encountered, and no convincing evidence of freedmen occupation was identified. In fact, the artifact assemblage even fails to reveal convincing evidence that the site was a Civil War camp (although this is clear from the historic documents).

From a management standpoint, however, the data recovery efforts are very successful, since they suggest that the core of the site has been green spaced and that along with fringe area there is likely little potential for the damage of important features.

This work emphasizes the need to ensure that the green spaced site area continues to be appropriately managed and cared for. It is essential that ground disturbing activities, such as utility easements and landscaping be carefully limited and, when necessary, monitored. But these details have been approved by OCRM and the SHPO.

Of greater concern is the continuing looting of Civil War sites by relic hunters. During the field work for this project we identified several areas in the field where a metal detector had been used, leaving the tale-tell evidence of small holes. There is little doubt that the site continues to picked over by those seeking to convert the public's heritage into private ownership. I strongly recommend that the site be posted for trespassing under S.C. Code of Laws §16-11-510 et seq. Section 16-11-520 makes malicious injury to real property a misdemeanor. Section 16-11-600 makes it a misdemeanor to trespass, with posting "a notice in four conspicuous places on the borders" deemed adequate notice.

While such measures will not prevent looting, coupled with locking the chain across the access road, it may help stem some of the problems until such time as property is sold. Once there are more individuals in the area it is likely that looting will decrease.

Beyond these measures, all of the data recovery efforts proscribed by the SHPO have been completed and we do not recommend any additional management activities at Lot 3.

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